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ABSTRACT

Devoted primarily to the criticism of news media, the journalism review model established in Chicago in 1968 was followed in the next five years by about 25 other journalism reviews across the country. While these reviews vary in format and policy, a recent survey indicated that the majority of them originate from journalist groups, operate independently and on limited budgets, and focus totally on print journalism. Some of the obstacles faced by journalism reviews include the small size of the journalistic community, the negative attitudes of the publishers and editors, the self-righteous bias of the reporters involved in the publication, and the need for a framework based on scientific theory and a philosophy of social communication. In spite of these shortcomings, the journalism reviews have exposed the problems of the press and have provided a forum of communication for media audiences, reporters, and editors. If these publications are to survive, it appears that their association with a university is desirable in that it imposes moderation, offers professional monitoring, and provides monetary assistance through foundation grants and prestige advertising. (MAI)

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTER REPORT NO. 0019

A LOOK AT JOURNALISM REVIEWS

This report, published as part of the Freedom of Information Center's series of "opinion" papers, was written by Claude-Jean Bertrand, a faculty member at the University of Paris. It is based on a study of media criticism while he was in the United States as a research fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies.

Introduction

The day after the press was born, press criticism came to life, but until recent times, practitioners usually were partisans or snobs. In the last century, the prostitution of the news media kindled the ire of advocates for social morality, but most of their castigations were scattered and buried in small circulation magazines, books and reports. Then, around 1970, the concentration of discontent in the environment became such as to cause a crystallization. Journalism reviews materialized all over the United States. Eight of the 10 largest cities have had a review. More than half the states have had at least one, with a predictable concentration on the East Coast and in the upper Midwest and California. After lasting an average of less than 18 months, two-thirds of the reviews vanished. Seemingly, the new formation was of an impermanent kind. This mattered little, insofar as the functions of the reviews appeared to be taken over by magazines and newspapers, by professional and scholarly publications. The U.S. press was now scrutinized as no other free press in the world had ever been, by investigative reporters, columnists, ombudsmen, press councils, ethics committees and professors.

If journalism reviews had done no more than blast a breach in the ramparts of complacency, they would deserve a celebration, which they have not yet had. No book, no article in an academic journal, only two master's theses and one doctoral dissertation, a few pieces in trade publications and a smattering of magazine stories have focused on these reviews — nearly all the attention going to the **Columbia Journalism Review**, the **Chicago Journalism Review** and **[MORE]**. Actually, the reviews were both less than a dam-bursting flash flood and more. At what could turn out to have been the takeoff point of a slow revolution in the press, working journalists stepped out of the closet; they asked to be treated not as salaried scribblers, but as professionals; and they appealed to the public for support. Nonetheless, journalism reviews were not so much a factor as an indicator of change. On the other hand, the need remains for independent, systematic, expert reviewing of journalism at the local, regional and national levels. Neither the heterogeneous mass, nor the profit-obsessed media, nor, of course, the government, can provide the surveillance that a public-service-cum-political institution requires. Hence, what is called for is not just a praiseful post-mortem, but an examination of why and how a great number of journalism reviews should and could be brought to life.

How They Came To Be

Let us leave broadcasting aside for a while and define a journalism review (JR) as a periodical devoted to the news media and primarily to the criticism of them. The leader of the troop appeared on the scene in October of 1968, when a group of Chicago journalists went public with their rage against the local press and established a model for about 25 JRs to be launched in the next five years (not to speak of those that never got off the drawing board in Albany, Boston, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City and Washington, D.C.). Yet it was in 1961, seven years before, that for the first time a school of journalism assumed the "obligation that falls on a serious professional school. . . to help stimulate continuing improvement in its profession and to speak out for what it considers right, fair and decent." Taking its cue from a Harvard-based quarterly, the **Nieman Reports** (1947), it produced the **Columbia JR**, which not only set a precedent for eight campus JRs, but broke ground for all reviews, including **CJR** in Chicago.

The birth of the pioneer JR, however, had occurred more than 20 years earlier, on May 20, 1940, when veteran newsman George Seldes (now 87) started **In Fact**, the first periodical to pick as its one and only target the sins of the press, in omission as in commission. With the support of big labor unions, the biweekly newsletter was to reach a top circulation of 176,000, higher than any later JR, and to last 10 years, longer than all except the **Columbia JR**. But **In Fact** was "red-baited to death" and folded in October 1950. Seldes

Summary: This report — a brief history and typology of journalism reviews, a list of the problems they met, a sketch of their achievements, and some suggestions for their survival — is based on a study of almost every journalism review published between 1968 and 1977, on the responses to a questionnaire that was sent out, and on interviews that were granted by at least one person involved in the production of each of the journalism reviews.

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was never a Communist, but libel and blacklisting have an enduring effect. Few news people have heard of the man. No JR has carried a profile of the precursor.

Though **CJR** was not the first JR chronologically, it did mark the starting point of the phenomenon; it was a local review and it was created solely by working journalists. At that time, in the United States (and nowhere else) all factors coincided. The college-educated servants of conservative monopolistic media corporations had been pummeled into consciousness first by the civil rights, then the anti-war, then the multidirectional protest movements. Not only did many a reporter sympathize with the dissenters, but he/she could better than anyone else realize that no such crisis would have taken place if the press had insured proper social communication. The journalist knew what a distorted picture the media gave of the protesters and how crucial a weapon the media must be in any movement toward participatory democracy. To coordinate and lead their Spartacan rebellion, news people could turn to no organization, but they had access to a new cheap technology that the underground press had already put to visible advantage against most institutions, including the media. Few American journalists would seek democratization of the news media by an intervention of the government, however strongly they might resent the debasement of the press by private business. The alternative was to do it themselves and the means came naturally — a counter press. The **CJR** proved it could be done, called a meeting of proselytes in April 1970, and sent evangelizers across the country.

In one vast concatenation, all JRs are related to previous criticism and to each other and to the most powerful movements in present-day American society. Just take one loop of chain. As **Thorn** (The Connecticut Valley JR) perceptively remarked in its first issue (1971), the new "rash of journalism reviews" participated in "the spirit of blow-the-whistle Naderism." Now, Nader regards G. Seldes as one of the two early determinants of his vocation. A. J. Liebling, the first famous periodical critic of the press, was another great reader of **In Fact.** He contributed to the pilot issue of the **Columbia JR**, from which the lineage is direct to **CJR**, then to [**MORE**], which created the Liebling Award. The first of these went to I.F. Stone, a self-confessed disciple of Seldes. Kinship in no way implies total resemblance, however. It is not always realized how diverse JRs have been and could be.

Types of Journalism Reviews

Journalists being the individualistic creatures they are, it seems natural for the first type to be the one-man JR. A distant forerunner was **Arthur McEwen's Letter**, a weekly published in 1894-95 by a former editorial writer of the San Francisco **Examiner**. Like him, in more recent times, most critics have found it more judicious not to take on the press exclusively. In Washington, D.C., I. F. Stone reviewed journalism only part time between 1962 and 1971, just as Cleveland's Roldo Bartimole has been doing since June 1968 in his biweekly **Point of View**. Not that full-time newsletter JRs are unthinkable. In 1972, R. Juran endeavored to cover the national media scene from San Diego. After six issues, he had only 300 subscribers and folded his monthly **Overset**, but then it was a magazine. And so was Joe La Rocca's **Countermedia** (Fairbanks, Alaska), which did resist two years (1972-74) but only as a part-time JR. Ron Dorfman, cofounder of **CJR**, which folded after its October 1975 issue, considers it "could still be a thriving enterprise had I wished to produce it myself in newsletter format, on the model of I. F. Stone's **Weekly**." That is what Cary Stiff (formerly of **The Unsatisfied Man**, Denver) did in 1976 with his **Weekly**, which he wanted to be a JR for weeklies.

At the risk of offending the above-mentioned left-winging mavericks, another newsletter has to be slipped into this first category. That it takes the press to task for pro-liberal distortion, that it is only a secondary means of publicity for the little non-journalistic group called Accuracy in Media and absorbs only one-tenth of a $250,000 budget whose origin is unclear — is, to a certain extent, irrelevant. Reed Irvine's monthly **AIM Report** is basically a one-man undertaking whose sole purpose in the last seven years has been to criticize the press. Probably also belonging here are an indefinite number of sheets mimeographed by media-oriented eccentrics. Such was **Gnats**, circulated within the San Francisco **Examiner** for two months in 1974 to try to lecture the paper into improving. Such has been the bizarre **Muckrackers**, of which Ralph G. Morley, M.D., of Long Island, has produced more than 80 issues since 1964.

News people do flock together periodically, at favorite watering holes, and they can act together, provided their hackles have been sufficiently raised. That is where and how must reporter-JRs were born. At a climax of the anti-war, anti-system agitation, the clubbing of journalists by the Chicago police during the 1968 Democratic Convention and the ensuing distortion of facts by media management under pressure from the Daley machine bred enough furor for young local reporters to meet above Ricardo's bar, form a militant group and then bring out **CJR**. Within two years, two JRs appeared in the Bay Area, three in New York, one in Providence, one in St. Louis and one in Denver. The next two years were the peak period: In 1971-72, nearly a dozen reporter-JRs were launched, in Honolulu, Philadelphia, the Connecticut Valley, New York, the Twin Cities, Santa Barbara, Baltimore, Portland, San Francisco and Houston. The end of the Vietnam War and the recession cooled the indignation in the press, then Watergate fired collective pride and selfish ambitions. Only two JRs appeared in 1973, in Portland and Dallas; only one in 1974 (Anchorage); and one in 1975 (Spokane) — the latter two extremely short-lived.

Actually the four reviews that followed in the tracks of **CJR** belonged not so much to the journalists' mutiny, as to the two movements that created a propitious climate for it. The first was the Berkeley-based **Ball & Chain Review** produced for nine months, beginning October 1969, by six black reporters, including the later famous Earl Caldwell. The other three JRs were byproducts of radical agitation about, but to some extent outside, the news media during the anti-war and women's liberation explosion of 1969-70. In New York, **Pac-O-Lies** (1969-70) came out four times, and the more moderate **Inside Media** put out one thick issue in March 1970, while in January and April **Overload** was published by a Berkeley collective funded by Protestant churches.

From the spring of that year, JRs were started by news people, most of whom believed the press could be reformed if only its misdeeds were pilloried in the marketplace. Their staying power proved greater. **Thorn** went to press only twice in eight months, but Denver's **TUM** (**The Unsatisfied Man**), came out regularly for about four years (1970-75), and the **St. Louis JR** (1970) is still publishing. What usually happened was that one day some 20 to 50 disgruntled news people met, set up an association and sometime later took the plunge. In the Twin Cities, the spark came from the preemption of the press council idea by the Minnesota publishers — in Houston, from agitation about a Guild election. In many places, very simply, after months of griping and groping someone just

said, "Let's do a review like those guys in Chicago." Each reporter would chip in a few dollars and the promise of a few stories. Then a smaller platoon of two to 10 invested a great amount of time and toil to put together an inexpensive 4- to 24-page monthly (sometimes bimonthly) tabloid or (more often) magazine. The makeup of the **Houston JR** was exceptionally attractive, and not all JRs could use artwork by Mauldin, like **CJR**, or by Prudim, like **TUM**, but most looked decently professional. Few were mimeographed like the **AP Review** (1970) and the **Yellow JR** (1972) or printed from typewritten material like some issues of **TCJR** (**Twin Cities JR**) (1972). Money for the printing was not easy to find but usually was found. **CJR** obtained enough subsidies, subscribers and street sales to keep its head more or less above water throughout its existence. The freely distributed **Hawaii JR** depended on donations, yet it died with money in the bank. Fund-raising parties, subscriptions and forums kept **TCJR** in relatively good financial health until 1977. Most local JRs managed to hobble along from one issue to the next. Not all, though: The **San Francisco Bay Area JR** cost its founders over $2,000 before it was killed off.

To that overall pattern, there have been at least three exceptions. After J. Anthony Lukas, enraged by the coverage of the Chicago 7 trial, suggested to fellow newsman R. Pollak that they start a New York JR, they obtained considerable financial backing and decided to put out a commercially viable tabloid that would take advertising (which most JRs shunned) and pay contributors (which no other local JR did). Hence, to cover the Big Apple, and to a lesser degree the national scene, [**MORE**] (1971-78) could use topflight talent. It fast earned even greater visibility than **CJR** and gave impetus to the whole reporter-review movement. The **Black JR**, started in 1976 by a former editor of **Muhammad Speaks**, also aimed at a national audience but mainly that of black news people. After two issues, lack of funds put it in limbo, from which it hoped to emerge with the help of a university. Quite different was the **Dallas JR** (1972-74). It was begun and financed, not by reporters, but by a church-based social action group. The Citizens for a Free Flow of Information hired a VISTA worker with a little journalistic experience to edit a bimonthly critique of the local media with the help of some news people.

Most JRs were independent publications. A few, though, came out as parts of existing periodicals. Some of these were section-JRs that merely expanded the media columns or pages featured in newsmagazines and alternative papers: **Media & Consumer** (1972-75) featured a 3- to 4-page "Journalism Review" section. In Sacramento, from September 1970 to at least the end of 1973, the mimeographed monthly **Guildsman** (later **Guild Journal**) often devoted more than half its pages to giving the daily **Bee** the JR treatment; and the **River City Review** (Omaha, 1975) was about one-third JR. Other reviews were piggyback JRs. The first issue of **Buncombe** (Baltimore) was inserted in **The Paper**, an alternative monthly. The only issue of the **Atlanta JR** (1971) had to be carried by the **Columbia JR**, while **Crossroads**, an alternative student publication on the Milwaukee campus of the University of Wisconsin, carried the four issues of **Add One** (1974). The latter review, however, which was done in close cooperation with the department of communication, belongs to the next category.

From 1971, JRs started flowering on campuses, some rooted in an SPJ-SDX chapter and some in a school of journalism. The first was the quarterly **Review of Southern California Journalism** (1971-75): SDX students at Cal State in Long Beach and (mainly) two faculty advisors did what Los Angeles area journalists ceaselessly ranted about — and, with little support from the university or from the news people, kept it going. The **Lexington Media Review** (University of Kentucky, 1974) and **Monitor** (University of South Carolina, 1974) are annual SDX students' JRs, while the one-shot **Madison JR** (University of Wisconsin, 1973), the two-time **Texas JR** (University of Texas in Austin, 1974-75) were, and **Comment** (Seton Hall University, N.J., 1971) is, a non-SDX student undertaking. Such is also **The Pretentious Idea** (1972), an award-winning annual JR initiated by students and put out by them, but as part of the academic curriculum. The journalism school of the University of Arizona in Tucson considers **TPI** a public service, as it does its other productions: the **Epitaph** for the town of Tombstone and a Chicano monthly for a suburb of Tucson. Most of the annual JRs are woefully inadequate and get little attention from the local media, but they could develop, given more involvement of faculty and journalists, which is what the **Review** had, and what **feed/back** has. **feed/back** (1974) models itself not on **CJR**, as the **Review** did, but on the **Columbia JR**. The heir to a black, a radical and a reporter JR, indirectly subsidized by San Francisco State University, produced by the students of a "Press Analysis" class, with half of its material written by news people, the quarterly has now become the best local media review, and second-best JR, in the country.

Working journalists despise campus JRs; they postulate the incompetence of their staffs and their submissiveness to the powers-that-be. The following category of part-time JRs would probably be excluded from the concept altogether by many journalists. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, all kinds of publications offered press criticism as a staple. Among them were some that dealt only with media matters. A few had always been censorious of the press. Others became so. What they all had in common was that criticizing journalism was not their chief purpose. Older publications serve professional organizations, like the **Bulletin** of the ASNE and the SPJ-SDX's **Quill**, both of which have turned much more critical in recent years — or like the **Guild Reporter**, which, of course, has regularly thrashed the industry. The yearly journal of the journalism school at the university in Missoula, the **Montana JR**, listed in 1958 as the first of its goals "to report and evaluate the performance of the mass media, with emphasis on newspapers and radio-TV stations," but it is hamstrung by lack of resources. The bimonthly **Grassroots Editor** (1960) long informed and anthologized local weeklies in a populist spirit that implied hostility toward the big overcommercialized media. Similarly, the **Alternative JR** (1966), being the bimonthly bulletin of the Alternative Press Syndicate, could not avoid deprecating the straight press. **Seminar** (1966-74) was launched as a house organ for the reactionary Copley Press, then moved toward becoming an anti-radical-liberal JR. The monthly reports of the Freedom of Information Center at the University of Missouri inevitably monitor media performance, as they cover all issues pertaining to the free flow of information. **Media Report to Women** (1973) publishes news for and about a social group so underrepresented and underprivileged in the industry that it cannot but be critical of it. As the organ of the National Citizens Committee for Better Broadcasting, **Access** definitely read like a media review, but not a journalism review: Its main concern lay in television's major products, not news.

JRs belong body and soul to print journalism. Any review anybody could cite out of hand was printed, and a survey of JR contents shows that 90 percent is devoted to the magazine

and newspaper press. Admittedly, some of the earlier JRs were broadcast, like D. Hollenbeck's **CBS Meets the Press** on radio after World War II and Charles Collingwood's **WCBS Views the Press** on television in the early 1960s. Yet they belong on the margins of the phenomenon. One reason is that, while it takes only a few dollars to get into print, no one can get on the air without permission from the broadcasting barons. At least in the minds of radio-television executives, JRs were bound to express as much desire to discredit a rival, and hostile, medium, as to improve journalism — with exceptions. The 30-minute **Milwaukee Media Review** produced by the department of communication of the University of Wisconsin was an authentic JR aired by a CBS-TV affiliate twice a month from 1973 through 1975 — at 8 a.m. on Sundays. **CJR** staffers in 1970 had a Saturday afternoon show on a small FM radio station; and **Thorn,** after stopping publication, was several times revived on WFCR-FM: rare cases of multimedia JRs. Also, in the last 10 years, non-commercial broadcasting has been doing some systematic media reviewing, like WNET's monthly **Behind the Lines** networked in prime time by PBS (1971-76); or, at the other extreme, **Media Under a Glass,** a little 30-minute weekly radio review done by students of Bowling Green University on WIOT-FM. There have been other broadcast JRs, like the Pacifica stations' **feedback** (WBAI) or **The Wayward Press** (KPFK), and columns, like Professor Roy Gibson's now three-year-old weekly two-minute review on KUTV in Salt Lake City. Generally speaking, though, activist reporters, journalism school critics and citizens' committees have been kept off the air. Management alleges that because of government regulation, radio and television are very vulnerable; must shun controversy; and, as regards their own operations, stand under permanent multiform scrutiny. Actually, public affairs programming is minimized so as to maximize profits within the non-expandable air time. As for broadcast journalists, high pay, short contracts and little union protection make them very careful, and not too many of them have taken part even in print JRs.

Obstacles

Of the many reviews that have appeared, most disappeared within two months or two years. A third of the JRs that emerged after 1968 held out for only five issues or less, and never had time to make an impact. Only a third of them endured for more than 10 issues. By 1974 there remained only four reporter-JRs. Was the whole eruption then "just a passing fad, a safety valve for one college generation affected with extraordinary irritability and impatience, and an ideological vogue," which was N. Hill's finale to his 1971 vilification in the **Saturday Review**? Is there something intrinsic or environmental that makes local JRs non-viable? They all encountered the same obstacles.

In their march toward professionalism, the rebellious mercenaries drew little encouragement from existing press-related institutions that should have supported the reform movement, and still might. Press clubs were usually not interested, but the public relations people who patronize them often eagerly subscribed to the reviews; and, exceptionally, the Honolulu Press Club funded one issue of the **Hawaii JR.** While JR founders often were active Guild members, The Newspaper Guild limited its participation to exhorting locals to help financially, and in Cleveland, Denver and Honolulu union membership voted **not** to give a JR any money. It was at Guild newspapers, however, that reviews usually appeared and survived. To quote C. Stiff, "The Guild didn't support **TUM,** but we could criticize our bosses and get away with it without losing our jobs." Some local chapters of the SPJ-SDX did assist JRs. The **Review,** for instance, got bulk subscriptions from the four Southern California chapters. Those that actually founded JRs, though, were campus chapters, with the exception of Spokane. As for national foundations, they fought shy, apart from the Fund for Investigative Journalism, which gave seven JRs sums ranging from $500 to $3,000. Big business, by the way, was more helpful: **TUM** obtained $1,000 from the Great Western Sugar Co. and the **Hawaii JR** was given grants by the Hawaiian Electric Co. and the Hawaiian Telephone Co. The Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ) did not wish to get involved. As for universities, only 12 of the 60-odd accredited journalism schools ever seriously encouraged the movement. To end this pitiful list, let it be recalled that no Pulitzer Prize ever went to a JR or to any press critic for that matter.

The major stumbling block in the path of JRs, however, was the small size of the journalistic community and the public's still very low level of interest in the media. In cities of 500,000 to 2 million inhabitants, most JRs could distribute only 500 to 2,000 copies. **CJR** was exceptional in reaching a top circulation of about 10,000, since on the national market [**MORE**] sold less than 30,000 and the **Columbia JR** less than 45,000. And those JRs have had trouble keeping their lay subscribers: They stay interested a couple of years and then consider they have had their fill of media criticism. A small potential audience, and an even smaller actual readership, entail a lack of revenue. Hence, after the first enthusiasm has waned, JRs have no funds to pay for good material and energetic laborers. Only four of the reviews (including the three best) could afford a full-time editor. Declining quality and irregular publication soon lose the JRs what few readers they have to start with.

The second major hurdle for JRs is the arrogance and/or paranoia of publishers, editors and (many) reporters. Their allergy to criticism is such that reviews are refused any kind of publicity and remain unknown to the general public. To sell 2,000 of its 5,000 print run, the **St. Louis JR** has had to contend with the absolute silence the local dailies have made around it for seven years now. In some cases, media executives screamed employee disloyalty and undertook to muzzle the reviews by threats, as in Chicago and Los Angeles, or by actual reprisals. Demotions and firings were vainly used in Philadelphia and Houston. The would-be editors of **Thorn** and of **Atlanta JR** were bounced for merely planning a review. The Portland media killed the **Oregon JR** by vetoing any participation of their staff in it. All this, however, has been relatively exceptional. Quite a few editors have dialogued with the local JR in its "Letters" section, sent in their checks and even written for it. Others were suspected of being in secret sympathy with the critics. As a consequence, all JRs have carried bylines, except the first issues of **CJR, the AP Review, Pac-O-Lies** and the **St. Louis JR.**

The worst resistance often came from the press proletariat. Not only were many reporters too satisfied, too cynical or too scared to lend any assistance, but sometimes they clearly opposed the conceited "nest-foulers" and "biters-of-the-hand-that-feeds." JRs were variously stigmatized as mediocre exercises in futility, ego-trips, bitching bulletins, sly attacks on free enterprise and even incitement to government intervention. The bimonthly **Buncombe** (Baltimore, 1972-73) offers a distressing example of JR unpopularity. It obtained so little response from working journalists that it had to return a $1,000 grant from

the Fund for Investigative Journalism just before it quietly folded. As regards the second major class of reviews, the universities, dependent as they are on the political and business establishment, feel no propensity to antagonize the media. Journalism schools want grants for themselves and jobs for their graduates. Among their faculty, the "green eyeshades" tend to remain myopically loyal to the industry, and the scholarly "chi-squares" have little but scorn for day-to-day monitoring.

A third threat to the JRs derives from an internal flaw. Most reviews are a labor of love by an individual or a little group who have more idealism, more courage, more free time, or simply less to lose than their 70,000 colleagues. These people are **individualistic reporters.** They know precious little about newspaper production, accounting, tax laws and post office regulations — and getting a cooperative venture organized represents a terrible strain on their egos. Rather sooner than later, their ardor burns out. The indifference their crusade meets with is fast debilitating, and the hostility it generates is hard to bear, especially in small communities. Add to that professional ambitions and family concerns, and at one point the leaders move away from the JR, often away from the city, sometimes away from journalism. Usually no one has the zeal and skill to take over the burden; the JR then dies or goes into a quick decline. The staff of the radical reviews, as those of the **AP Review** and the **Ball & Chain Review**, drifted apart. **TUM** did not resist very long after C. Stiff left his soft job on the Sunday edition of the Denver **Post** to start his own local weekly. The **Hawaii JR** folded not very long after the founding couple (both in television) stopped devoting their considerable leisure to JR chores.

Quite a few reporter-JRs could have been saved by an alternative publication or by a journalism school, but they preferred to fold rather than compromise their independence. Working journalists were going public with their criticism, but considered they alone were qualified to criticize. They often dismiss the **Columbia JR** for being academically dull and irrelevant. As for journalism school JRs, students are accused of not knowing what they're talking about. Reporter-JRs, however, show just as serious an in-built failing. Rarely are journalists indicted as a class for vanity, submissiveness, superficiality, dislike of change or lack of social consciousness. And one gets the idea that all the ills of the press originate with owners, advertisers, editors, politicians and judges.

Self-righteous bias is not the only problem with media monitor contents. This, in the case of the **Yellow JR** (Santa Barbara, 1972) was so slight, it is no wonder only seven news people subscribed. But in any city (outside of New York and Washington, D.C.) is there enough muck to keep the rakers busy every month for years on end? A quarterly report-and-review covering all the media in a large area may have no difficulty filling 20 to 80 pages, but local JRs, most of them monthly, are open to the charge that they would print anything, mistaking rhetorical outbursts for investigative reporting, office gossip for useful revelations, private vendettas for legitimate grievances. Even the best JRs, like **CJR** or **TUM**, published badly researched, badly structured, badly written pieces. Rejecting, or merely editing, a free contribution can alienate one more member of the small journalistic community. Even good editing could not help non-stories. Because almost all JRs originated within metropolitan newspapers (sometimes, as in Philadelphia, at one daily only), they got few stories from and about the other media. **TUM** was not the only review accused of neglecting the outstate press. Rare were the reviews with broadcasters on their team, like the **Houston JR** and the **Hawaii JR**, so radio and television usually got short shrift. Checking for accuracy, getting the opposing view, even good proofreading, practices that JRs vehemently advocated, they themselves violated for lack of volunteer labor. The staffs were not unaware of those failings; and some reviews, like **TUM** and the **Houston JR**, printed critical evaluations of themselves. Nowadays, **feed/back** in every one of its issues features a one-page section by its own in-house critic. On balance, however, what strikes an unprejudiced reader is the excellence of so many articles that must have required long hours of investigation and writing, sometimes at considerable risk, and never for any reward. Judging from the later careers of many media monitors, it is obvious they were among the best local reporters, not soured mediocrities.

Even if material and manpower were abundant, a further problem would arise: how to tailor the product to the readership. Is the JR to be primarily an anti-house organ not meant for the public, as the **AP Review** was to the wire service and the **Journalists Newsletter** (1970-73) was to the Providence, R.I., **Journal & Bulletin**? And then should it be directed at reporters or at editors and publishers? Or should the JR aim at a wider readership, the local decision-makers and opinion-leaders, or even the whole liberal constituency? And then should it focus on reviewing the media, reporting on them or supplementing them? A JR that undertakes to talk to both publics, as it ought to, must tread a narrow path between being an organizational bulletin, which bores outsiders to tears, and a popular magazine that news people would treat as junk mail.

A further pitfall, rarely mentioned, is political, in the wide sense of the word. If a JR's whole activity is not undergirded by some ideology, however vague, by some concept of what the press and society should be and how to progress toward that ideal, it is bound, sooner or later, to slump into monotonous sterility. The shocking revelation of journalistic offenses can be effective: a litany of sins cannot — unless one or several ways to salvation are offered. After a survey of 20th century media criticism, D. Rubin is tempted to sweep it aside as useless: Most problems are "probably not susceptible of solution within the framework of private ownership of the press." Is there no difference between the press of the 1920s and that of the 1970s, no difference between the Louisville **Courier-Journal** and the San Francisco **Chronicle**, both privately owned? Has not the "social responsibility" doctrine of the press played some part, via criticism, in the improvement of the U.S. press? And, after all, that excellent and prosperous French daily **Le Monde**, so often praised as an example by JRs, is privately owned, albeit by its editor, manager and staff. What is true is that the principles defended by JRs — like accuracy, fairness or minority employment — should be, and never are, rooted in a scientific theory and in a philosophy of social communication. Nor do reviews even express a strategy for public control of the mass media. "There's no journal that has a sophisticated left analysis of the media. . . understanding what the media are about, what they really represent, how they really function in society. There was, is, no public voice which translates that information into some language that is accessible to people who work in the media": such is the 1977 conclusion of Michael Singer, co-founder of **Pac-O-Lies**.

Achievements

All those obstacles were too much for most local reviews,

and they fell by the wayside. Supposing they were a one-day wonder, supposing no second generation is in the making, what did they reveal, expose, achieve that warrants them a niche in the history of the U.S. press? They revealed not so much the discontent among working journalists, which is endemic, as a quantum leap in that discontent. Groups of reporters walked out into the public squares to call attention to the press. This denoted a shift of loyalty from media capitalists to media consumers, from employers to clients. An indisputable sign of professionalization. No longer could JRs be dismissed as mavericks venting their spleen, or media lashing out at rivals, or Ivy League journals lecturing the journalistic hoi polloi.

What JRs exposed were the sins and perils of the press, as seen from the inside. They provided hard media news and instant analysis. Who reads through them all gets an accurate picture of the American press and an idea of U.S. press problems in the last 10 years. The most common types of stories are the documented attack on a particular press misdeed (like offering editorial puffery to buyers of advertising space or blindly supporting the local police) and the discussion of general media issues (like shield laws or gag orders). Most JRs also provide non-critical information on the media, both news and education. Many reviews, like the **St. Louis JR** or the **Houston JR**, have given news makers space to express their views of the press. A few, like **CJR**, published stories the media had spiked or ignored (about the murder of Black Panthers or the regulation of cable television). Apart from major stories, all reviews had at least a few regular sections, including letters, typos-and-goofs or book reviews. A number of JRs perceived that they had to be of practical use to reporters and kept them posted on the whereabouts of their colleagues in a "transitions" section. And just about all had a section for which they vied to find an original title — from [**MORE**]'s "Hellbox and Rosebuds" to **feed/back**'s "etaoins and shrdlus" — an unpretentious list of "kudos and knocks" (**Hawaii JR**) that was the most popular and perhaps the most immediately efficient part of the reviews.

Discounting special issues like the **TCJR** examination of business and labor coverage, all reviews dealt with a wide range of subjects, yet an examination of over 1,000 articles brings out a clear hierarchy of major themes. In first place come the dissatisfaction of news people and its many expressions: JRs, the alternative press, Newspaper Guild action, the Reporter Power movement, the general concern for ethics. Second in frequency stands criticism of the mediocrity of the news, attributed to the sloth or crookedness of a particular reporter or, much more often, to the cowardliness, conformism, parochialism or prejudices of editors and to the rapacity and avarice of media owners. Three themes are almost equally represented in the third rank. First, complaints about the conservatism of press barons, their hostility to any kind of dissent, their staunch support of business interests and of incumbent politicians, their efforts to expand their wealth and power. Second, stories on the difficult relations of the press with government, the legislatures, the bureaucracy, the police and the courts. And third, profiles of new or original press organs and practitioners. As a last major theme come attacks on sexism and racism in the news and in the newsrooms.

It is hard to measure what the JRs achieved, for other forces were pushing in the same direction, nationally and sometimes locally. In Honolulu and Philadelphia, for instance, a change in management so improved the environment at the better newspapers that some former reviewers consider a JR is now uncalled for. Veterans of the durable **CJR** can point to any number of local victories, while even the little **AP Review** seems to have provided **Newsweek** with a story. Many JRs cannot document any significant achievement except surviving, but the longer-lived list precedent-making changes of the kind that can slowly snowball, like hiring more women and blacks or putting an end to freebies and junkets. The readership of the JRs was undoubtedly small. The person-in-the-street had not heard about them, but they were known by higher officials, by politicians and by businessmen, the country-club friends of publishers and station owners. They were scrutinized in the newsroom. Any self-respecting editor on a metropolitan daily reads the **Columbia JR** and read [**MORE**]. Who can doubt the impact when a mere allusion to his publication in a letter published by [**MORE**] prompted a top editor of the Los Angeles **Times** to send me a correction, all the way to Europe?

As the JRs see it, the influence of the more durable reviews was threefold. A JR was a watchdog: "It made reporters aware that they had to be careful because their peers were watching over them" (J. Burris, **Hawaii JR**). It was a consciousness-raiser: "One thing we did was sensitize our audience to the problems of the media" (C. Stiff, **TUM**). And it was a forum: "What the review has done is to start some channels of communication among reporters. Before we never knew people across media lines" (C. Lacey, **TCJR**). To sum up, "Most of what the JRs accomplished is subconscious, it is intangible. It is in the atmosphere, in the relationship between editors and reporters" (D. Rottenberg, **CJR**).

All reviews, consciously and more often unconsciously, were an expression of, and an encouragement to, a movement whose lonely champions were Ron Dorfman of **CJR** and Dick Pollak of [**MORE**]. It may have aborted, but could merely have gone incognito since Watergate. Under the name Reporter Power, it revulsed both media managers and realists, for they imagined that the lowly journalists dreamed of grabbing ownership. Whether militants called it Voice in the Product, Democracy in the Newsroom or Workers' Participation, what they actually wanted was no longer to be two-legged tape recorders for glorified shoppers. They wanted the news flow to be entrusted to them as expert professionals. They wanted it to be as free from control by dollar-hungry corporate executives, as it should be from control by power-hungry politicians and bureaucrats. Few media companies have placed reporters on their boards of directors or even allowed them a say in selecting editors; but on the better papers, the autonomy of specialized staffers and the open-mindedness of management has clearly improved in the last 10 years. "In the past," says Donald Drake (of the **Philadelphia JR**), "the total newspaper was determined by the people at the top. In the JR era, reporters started to say 'Hey wait a minute, we at the bottom want to have a say in the product because this is part of our life, and we are intelligent people.' So what happened was that the stories began to dictate what the newspaper would be like."

One way to achieve the distant goal is to promote class-consciousness among journalists. Another is to develop public support. All JRs did both as publications, but many went a step further. Most gave fund-raising parties that brought together news people from the various local media. Some organized conferences for the rank and file, while others included news people and public relations people, journalism students, professors and enlightened citizens. The best attended of these events have been the Liebling counter-conventions organized every year by [**MORE**], after

the first in 1972 attracted tremendous attention. **Ball & Chain Review** convened black journalists at Lincoln University (Jefferson City, Mo.). **TCJR**'s Midwest Forums were regarded as a major factor in its survival. Even the short-lived **Viewpoint** (Spokane, Wash.) managed a successful conference in 1975; **feed/back**'s 1976 dinner was a disaster, because 200 media people were expected and 400 came. Quite apart from the boozing and socializing, the popularity of all those meetings indicates how much reporters feel the need for them. Like the reviews, they signal to media executives that absolutism has to give way at least to benevolent despotism, if they wish to avoid constitutional monarchy.

Why Journalism Reviews Are Needed

The **Columbia JR** is now so well established that its future seems assured, although it did have problems substituting advertising for foundation support. Partly through bad management, [**MORE**] had lost $450,000 in five years and had to be sold in 1976. It was turned into a magazine, and within a year its new publisher had also gone too far into debt; yet when [**MORE**] was offered for sale, there was no lack of buyers. After a pilot issue in September 1977, the **Washington JR** brought out two fat issues in 1978. The major cause of its death in mid-1978 was the poor quality of its third avatar. The two young non-journalists who worked on it, concentrating on the business side of the magazine, believed that 10 to 20,000 subscriptions, plus advertising, would make the review of the capital's press commercially successful. But what of local JRs now? The need for them is less obvious since the industry itself indulges in media criticism. The alternative and community papers as well as city magazines bring out some of the stories the newspapers had rather bury. Who needs the **Philadelphia JR** now that the **Philadelphia Magazine**, the **Philadelphia Newsletter** and **The** (alternative) **Drummer** all regularly cast a disapproving eye on a much improved daily press? Anyway, after so many local JRs have failed, their viability too is far from obvious. Yet the point to be made is that local and regional JRs are both needed and viable.

They are needed because, in the words of Carl Bernstein, "Nothing is less justified than the orgy of self-congratulation that followed Watergate"; the U.S. press is still not doing the adequate job it should and can afford to do. They are needed because no national JR can possibly watch over the whole press, any more than a national news council can. Both tend to limit their coverage to the best media, which are not what most Americans consume. They are needed because the Burlington,Iowa, **Hawk Eye** is almost unique in allowing staff participation in editorial policy, and the Charleston, W. Va., **Gazette** in using a battery of public accountability procedures. Only a miniscule percentage of the thousands of dailies and weeklies can or will salary a media beat reporter (as the **L.A. Times**), or an in-house critic (as the Washington **Post**), or an ombudsman — and such employees cannot be as tough-minded, anyway, as an independent agent. A very small proportion of the news media benefit from a state press council, as does the Minnesota press, or from a local one like those of Littleton, Colo., or Hilo, Hawaii. JRs are needed because newsmagazines, quality magazines and alternatives lash out at the media only occasionally and avoid self-flagellation. The shell of smugness the press builds around itself has been cracked, not shattered. More criticism cannot cause instant metamorphosis, but it can certainly help reformers inside and outside the industry. Lastly, JRs are needed because journalists must have a local rallying point of their own and must develop some kind of national solidarity.

Alternatives for Survival

As for the feasibility of such JRs, there are five existing alternatives. Until 1977 **TCJR** showed that in a homogeneous, progressive environment and in the absence of steady, local, media criticism, with occasional discreet support from a journalism school and a regular rotation of multimedia editorial teams, an "old-fashioned" reporter-JR could survive long past the protest era. The fact that, compared to the heavyweights among the defunct JRs, **TCJR** was light in both quality and impact, is but further proof that the breed could yet multiply.

The only living reporter-JR owes its durability to the devotion of an idealistic media freak. After he had launched **Focus/Midwest** (an alternative magazine) and the **St. Louis JR**, Charles Klotzer started a typesetting business. This he has made so successful that he can now say: "I'm going to keep publishing the review until Doomsday comes. I don't care what it costs." The case is exceptional, but does it have to be?

It can be argued that, except perhaps in a metropolis like Chicago, interested news people and lay people are too few to provide the articles and the work and the funds needed to keep a JR alive. Then two more solutions are available. One is to make the review only a part-time JR, like **Point of View** in Cleveland. The problem is that in a "journalism supplement and review," press criticism tends to take a back seat, unless the editor, like Bartimole, has a clear perception of the central role of the media in society. The other solution is for the JR to ride piggyback. This solves printing and distribution problems. It widens the audience enormously, for the review then reaches many citizens interested in reforming institutions but not ready to subscribe to a paper devoted exclusively to only one of them. On the other hand, this can deprive a reporter-JR of independence, make it too tame or too virulent, depending on the tone of the supporting publication. It also exposes contributors to the accusation of working for a competing medium.

At the present stage, the fifth solution seems the best. The majority of existing JRs are put out on campuses — as is the oldest and best known of them all. On the whole, universities are conservative, admittedly, and journalism schools themselves need all the criticism they can get; yet the advantages they offer outweigh such restrictions. The **Columbia JR** and **feed/back** prove it, at the national and local levels. Association with a university does impose moderation; but this, after some needed wild yawps have opened apathetic ears, is more efficient in bringing about change. Association with a university provides respectability, protection, technical and administrative facilities, postal privileges and subsidies, and — most important, perhaps — expertise, stability and manpower. Faculty members can supervise close monitoring, content analysis and in-depth surveys that the press itself should do and that reporter-JRs cannot afford to do. They can also free the review from the inevitably narrow vision of the news processors and seek the views of news consumers and news makers. Adjunct professors can insure permanent input and feedback from the press. Students can do the research and production and thus acquire credits, experience and ethical awareness. Besides such gains by its wards, the university is given an opportunity to exercise its vital function in the continuing adaptation and progress of society.

Some Americans may dispute that there is any link bet-

ween the overall quality of their press and the unique development of journalism education in the country. Who will deny that the improvement of the press in the last generation (which even such critics as Seldes, Stone and Bagdikian acknowledge) is inseparable from the fact that almost 60 percent of news people, almost 80 percent of big city newspaper journalists, are now college graduates? Much is made of the recent Watergate-induced popularity of journalism schools. More important is that they have been moving away from being hiring halls and becoming more integrated into the academic world. The most prestigious of them set a courageous example 16 years ago that others can now follow. Though the biggest of them, at the University of Texas in Austin, has been incapable of doing more than let its students put out two mediocre issues of an annual JR, it has been proved in Tucson and San Francisco that even a small department of journalism in a state university can do a certainly imperfect, but remarkable, annual or quarterly job.

Even with four dation grants, then prestige advertising, the **Columbia JR** has never balanced its budget. **feed/back** is built on the unpaid dedication of an exceptional trio: a department chairman, a star reporter and a first-rate graduate student. Even annual campus JRs skip a year from time to time for lack of funds. And money is needed not just to print, but to pay for a staff and for contributions. In the last issue of **TUM** (Winter 1975), Mort Stern, ex-assistant publisher of the Denver **Post** and dean of the University of Colorado journalism school, wrote that "critics are the media's best friends. The industry ought to be looking for ways to bankroll their critics, to permanently institutionalize criticism, out of self-interest." He added that universities should be involved in the undertaking.

Is this unrealistic? The Peoria, Ill., **Journal-Star** finds it worthwhile to pay $15,000 a year for its Women's Advisory Board. Newspaper foundations now contribute to the funding of the National News Council, whose decisions are published by the **Columbia JR**. The Minnesota Press Council, which is financed by the press, is now housed in the school of journalism that contributed so much to its establishment. Another ground-breaking realization was Ghiglione's **New England Daily Newspaper Survey** (1973), executed by journalism critics and professors with the cooperation of editors and publishers. An association of owners, workers and educators for the development of JRs is in line with such precedents.

Conclusion

For monopolistic news media to avoid autocratic/bureaucratic enslavement and to escape plutocratic bondage, or merely for them to stop serving exclusively the majority in a pluralistic society, more responsibility must be taken by the profession, on behalf of the public, with its participation and under its control. If the intervention of legislatures, courts and regulatory agencies is to be kept at a minimum, the democratization of the press can be realized only through a vast informal network of monitors, feedback purveyors and access-makers (with the possible assistance of new technology in the near future). The United States is the only country where the embryo of such a system is developing and it includes college courses in media accountability; workshops and conferences on press ethics; license-challenging citizens' groups for better broadcasting; committees for community control of cable television and even panels of readers regularly consulted (as by the St. Petersburg **Times**); local, state and national news councils; free-press/fair-trial committees and the ethics committees of such bodies as the ASNE and APME; Guild-sponsored, joint staff-management groups (as at the Minneapolis **Tribune** and **Star**); local militant associations (like the San Francisco Media Alliance) and national organizations like those of black and female journalists; readers' advocates; bureaus of accuracy and fair play; media criticism columns and features, op-ed pages, expanded letters-to-the-editor sections and regular letters-from-the-editor.

Media reviews could become a major element of the system as watchdogs of the press, as reporters, promoters and coordinators of all the other controlling curs, and as vulgarizers of research in the theory and practice of mass communication. All progress is predicated on the citizenry's awareness of how crucial the press is to them, of how greatly its services could be improved, and of how powerfully they can influence it. The growth of that awareness seems desperately slow to radicals. To the historian it is revealed to be exponential.

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